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INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1454

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1532

RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 6644

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000466

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP;  
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU; NSC FOR FARAH PANDITH

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TAGS: KISL PREL SA

SUBJECT: GUARDED OPINION OF CAPABILITIES OF OIC

REF: A. JEDDAH 236

1B. JEDDAH 366

1C. 05 JEDDAH 4970

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller, for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: An AmCit employee of the Islamic Development Bank dismissed the Organization of the Islamic Conference as an organization that has no credibility with its members or the rest of the international community. He described the OIC as little more than a forum for Arab outrage. He also related that Asian officials resented the OIC because it does not address issues of importance to them or listen to their recommendations. He asserted that a complete restructuring of the OIC would be required to turn it into an influential organization. Major management changes have occurred under the new Secretary General, but many of the changes seem to follow the pattern of appealing to Muslim pride and prejudice rather than to developing effective policies. END SUMMARY.

IT DOESN'T DO ANYTHING; IT DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING; AND NOBODY PAYS ANY ATTENTION TO IT ANYWAY

12. (C) In response to Washington's request for more information on the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Pol/Econ Chief met with an AmCit who occupies a senior position with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), a subsidiary organization of the OIC. When asked his opinion of the OIC and its activities, he responded: "It doesn't do anything; it doesn't say anything; and nobody pays any attention to it anyway." Expanding on this pithy assessment, he continued that the OIC has devolved into an organization with few concrete programs that acts primarily as a "soapbox" for Arab complaints. Its various forums, he asserted, generally do little but provide an uncritical endorsement of the Arab or Islamic "cause." (Note: The recent Baku Declaration in support of Iran's right to enrich nuclear fuel is an example of this inclination to pander to Muslim public opinion. End Note.)

OIC EXHIBITS SURPRISE THAT ANYONE IS PAYING ATTENTION

13. (C) As an example of the OIC's diminished position, he pointed out that the IDB had originally been established as a loan-making subsidiary of the OIC. In contrast to the OIC, the IDB has flourished and administers important loan

programs thought the world. Now each year, this formerly subsidiary organ, votes a grant to support the operations of the OIC. Independent confirmation that even the OIC's own staff view their activities as impotent may be provided by the recent controversy over the meeting of the OIC's Islamic Boycott Office (reftel A). After parrying Consulate General's inquiries for weeks, an abashed OIC official informed ConGenOff that they were shocked to find the attention of the U.S. focused on what had become a yearly formality (reftel B).

#### ASIAN MUSLIMS CUT OUT

¶4. (C) The source, who is of Asian origin and whose work takes him frequently to Asian member states of the IDB, noted that officials of these countries, especially Malaysia and Pakistan, often express annoyance that the OIC devotes its meetings to debating Arab complaints and then issues declarations that seldom reflect input from Asian leaders.

#### OIC LACKS CREDIBILITY WITH EAST AND WEST

¶5. (C) In discussing the future prospects of the OIC, the source agreed with Pol/Econ Chief that with its broad reach throughout the Muslim World, the OIC has the potential to be a bridge between the West and the Muslim World, but he was not optimistic that the OIC could actually fulfill that role anytime soon. Currently the OIC faces a dilemma. It has no real credibility with either the Muslim or non-Muslim world. The OIC would have to demonstrate the ability to develop genuine, effective, consensus positions for the Islamic states and demonstrate that it could influence the West in order to develop credibility among Muslim states. Conversely, it would have to be able to demonstrate the

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ability to moderate and influence the opinions of the Muslim peoples in order to have credibility with the West.

#### COMPLETE RESTRUCTURING NEEDED; EFFECTIVENESS WILL BE A LONG TIME COMING

¶6. (C) In the source's view, developing this level of credibility will be a difficult task, given the current level of hostility between Muslim and non-Muslim. He opined that the OIC would have to undergo a complete restructuring. He speculated that it would take a long time for the OIC to develop the stature to mediate between East and West. He thought that trust and confidence-building would have to be forged slowly and in non-controversial areas, such as disaster relief, or cooperation on relatively mundane aspects of Muslim-Western relations.

#### OIC MANAGEMENT RECOGNIZES NEED FOR CHANGE

¶7. (C) A small, bright note, in the source's opinion, is that the new management of the OIC, under the leadership of Turkish Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu appears to recognize that wholesale changes are needed if the OIC is to play a useful role in international affairs. Since he assumed the Secretary General position, Ihsanoglu has made many changes in the management staff of the organization. Indeed, virtually everyone from the OIC that has met with Consulate General staff was appointed to his current position by Ihsanoglu during the past year. Ihsanoglu has also instituted a number of new initiatives in an effort to revitalize the OIC. Among them, the OIC sponsored a Summit of Islamic Nations at Mecca in December 2005. From that summit came several programs designed to influence the policy of the Islamic states (reftel C). Among the programs is a campaign to combat Islamophobia and to promote intra-OIC trade.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The source painted a pessimistic picture of the OIC and its prospects for acting as a useful instrument for moderating the hostility between Muslim states and the

non-Muslim world. In the source's view, fundamental change within the OIC is essential. Some of these changes may be occurring now under an ambitious new Secretary General. However, many of the OIC's new initiatives appear to be designed to improve its credibility with Muslims in precisely the way that will diminish its reputation in the West. As the source, who is Muslim and very proud of his American citizenship, pointed out, the Islamophobia campaign criticizes the West for the slightest perceived slight of Islam, but does nothing to restrain the virulent jihadist language that emanates from many mosques. And the trade initiative focuses not on preparing Islamic countries to participate in the WTO, but rather to encourage trade exclusively within the Islamic community, thus further segregating, rather than integrating, the Islamic community from the world at large. It will take a number of years of careful interaction on non-controversial matters before the OIC can be expected to have significant influence on major conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim. END COMMENT.

Gfoeller